

COMMITTEE ON
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COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES
AIR AND LAND FORCES

UNITED STATES GROUP OF THE
NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

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April 22, 2008

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500

Mr. President:

First, let me commend you on your decision to release \$200 million in emergency food aid from the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust to help nations facing surging food prices. The United States has a responsibility to help nations whose citizens are unable to purchase essential food staples during this time of worldwide food price increases.

I am especially concerned about Haiti, the nation eligible for food aid that is geographically closest to the United States. A significant infusion of food aid will allow the government of Haiti the time to find a long-term, successful set of solutions to nationwide hunger and joblessness.

On Monday, I returned from a two-day emergency trip to Haiti during which I met with Haiti's President René Préval, U.S. Ambassador Janet Sanderson, business leaders, and representatives from humanitarian and development organizations in Haiti. President Préval and I discussed the rising price of food there and ways to provide humanitarian assistance to the Haitian people. After my trip, I can attest to the fact that food is getting to the island nation, but it is too expensive for most Haitians, roughly 80% of who live on less than \$2 per day.

President Préval identified to me his government's short and long term goals during this difficult time.

Of utmost importance is that Haiti receives direct monetary and humanitarian assistance from the United States and the international community. It is my profound hope that the island nation be given special consideration as your administrators parcel out the \$200 million in aid money, and that Haiti receive at least \$15 million in direct monetary assistance. Additional aid from the Emerson Trust in the form of wheat and other essential food commodities are needed too. President Préval has determined that over the next six months, Haiti requires: 30,000 metric tons of rice (4 percent broken quality) per month; 15,000 metric tons of wheat per month; and 7,000 tons of cooking oil per month.

President Préval renewed his request asking that you grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitian immigrants in the United States. The President made his request to you in

writing on February 7, and Congressman Alcee Hastings and I wrote you on February 20 in support of TPS. We all feel that Haiti's ongoing political and economic struggles, and the extraordinary destruction caused by several natural disasters more than qualifies Haitian nationals for TPS.

President Préval asked that you support legislation, the introduction of which is imminent, that will follow up on the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity Partnership Encouragement Act of 2006 (HOPE). The HOPE II Act will enable the Haitian textile and garment industry to expand their production capabilities and hire more Haitian workers by opening up the U.S. marketplace to Haitian exports. I am working closely with Chairman Charlie Rangel of the House Ways and Means Committee on this vital legislation. The original, but much more narrow, HOPE legislation appears to be responsible for an infusion of several thousand jobs and the reopening of seven garment factories, boosting industrial employment by almost 50 percent in one year's time. Those trade preferences though will expire in 2009.

The Jubilee Act is another piece of legislation President Préval strongly supports. This legislation passed in the U.S. House of Representatives, and would provide significant debt relief for countries like Haiti. This year, Haiti will send \$48.7 million in debt payments to multilateral financial institutions. That money would be better spent on providing clean water, healthcare and education to the Haitian people.

Finally, President Préval requested the assistance of the Drug Enforcement Agency to help clamp down on the trafficking of illicit drugs through Haiti. The final destination of these drugs is the United States. The criminal elements in Haiti contributed to the unrest in Haiti that occurred earlier in April, further exacerbating Haiti's food and hunger challenges. I am in contact with Admiral James Stavridis, Commander of SOUTHCOM, and look forward to traveling to Haiti with him in the near future to examine ways to tackle this serious problem.

Again, Mr. President, I commend you on your leadership in forwarding much needed aid to Haiti. Without the proper attention, Haiti's progress can be undone and people will continue to lose their lives from unrest and violence. Already this year, in just under four months, over 900 Haitians fleeing their homeland have been interdicted at sea by the United States Coast Guard. Last year, over 1600 Haitians were interdicted at sea. The journey from Haiti to the U.S. is a perilous one, often resulting in the tragic loss of life, as happened this past weekend off the Bahamian coast.

It continues to be in the United States' best interests, both morally and financially, to do all that we can help our neighbor to thrive. Mr. President, I thank you for your kind consideration and look forward to working with you on a long-term solution to Haiti's challenging problems.

Sincerely,



KENDRICK B. MEEK
Member of Congress